Supercomputing Challenge draws more than 200 students to Los Alamos National Laboratory

April 16, 2015

NOTE TO EDITORS: Media are welcome to attend the awards ceremony from 9 a.m. to noon a.m., April 21 at the Church of Christ, 2323 Diamond Drive, Los Alamos.

Student teams from around New Mexico showcase year-long research projects April 20-21

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., April 16, 2015—More than 200 New Mexico students and their teachers are at Los Alamos National Laboratory April 20-21 for the 25th annual New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge expo and awards ceremony.

“One of the goals of the year-long competition is to teach student teams how to use powerful computers to analyze, model and solve real-world problems,” said David Kratzer of the Laboratory’s High Performance Computer Systems group, the Lab’s coordinator of the Supercomputing Challenge. “Participating students improve their understanding of technology by developing skills in scientific inquiry, modeling, computing, communications and teamwork, and have fun doing it.”

The Challenge is project-based learning geared to teaching a wide range of skills: research, writing, teamwork, time management, oral presentations and computer programming. Any New Mexico middle-school or high-school student is eligible to enter the Supercomputing Challenge.

While at the Laboratory, students will present their projects and take part in tours, talks, and demonstrations with Laboratory scientists.

Student projects will be recognized during an awards ceremony from 9 a.m. to noon, Tuesday, April 21 at the Church of Christ Auditorium, 2323 Diamond Drive in Los Alamos. More than $20,000 in scholarships will be awarded to student participants, along with many plaques and cash awards.

Next generation of computer scientists

According to Bob Robey of the Laboratory’s Eulerian Codes Group and Challenge Board president, more than 100 Lab staff members got their start in the Supercomputing Challenge program.

“The Supercomputing Challenge is one of the most effective of the STEM programs in New Mexico, if not the country,” said Robey. “The graduates of the Supercomputing Challenge program provide a talent base to attract high-technology businesses and programs to New Mexico."

Structural engineer Crystal Rodarte-Romero of the Laboratory’s Engineering Project Delivery Group participated in the Supercomputing Challenge while attending Española Valley High School in 1995. Her team won the Environmental Modeling Award and was second overall that year. “It has opened many doors for me,” Rodarte-Romero said of the challenge. “It’s given me exposure to the technical aspects of working with engineers and scientists,” while also firming up her college aspirations and helping her learn how to write reports and speak before large and small audiences.

Kratzer noted the support of nearly 100 Los Alamos employees and another 50 individuals from Sandia National Laboratories, universities and business, who volunteer to work on the Supercomputing Challenge**.** “Without the support of these volunteers we couldn’t provide the first-class event we do for the students who have worked so hard to get to this point. I am grateful for their assistance,” he said.

More information about the New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge, including lists of student projects and sponsors, is on the Supercomputing Challenge web page.